

2011 NACOL Virtual School Symposium
Pre-Conference Session
Evaluation in K-12 Online Learning

7:45 am **Coffee and snacks (in foyer)**

8:00 am **Overview and introductions**

- Introductions (Tom Clark)
- Definitions and plan for the afternoon (Elizabeth Oyer)
- Why do online learning programs need evaluation and research? (Tom Clark)

8:20 am **Presentation 1: Identifying what we want to know**

- Identifying evaluation needs and questions (Ronda Eshleman & Mary Brabson, Indiana Online Academy; Joe Cozart, Georgia Virtual School)
- Selecting evaluation methods and formulating evaluation questions (Elizabeth Oyer)

Small groups: What do we want to know? (guided by questions in Overview slides)

Handout: Evaluation Action Plan Template (Tom Clark, Susan Lowes, & Elizabeth Oyer)

9:20 am **Break**

9:30 am **Presentation 2: Defining and measuring outcomes**

- Defining measurable outcomes (Tom Clark)
- Outcomes-Based Program Evaluation (Liz Pape)

Small groups: Measuring your success (guided by questions in Overview slides)

Handout: Outcomes-based quality measures (Liz Pape)

10:30 am **Break**

10:40 am **Presentation 3: Facilitating/Conducting Evaluation Activities**

- Finding and working with evaluators (Elizabeth Oyer, Tom Clark)
- Facilitating an external evaluation/conducting an internal evaluation activity (Ronda Eshleman & Mary Brabson, Indiana Online Academy; Joe Cozart, Georgia Virtual School)

Small groups: unanswered questions; barriers to evaluation

- Discuss and compile unanswered questions; Q & A with presenters on questions
- Discuss organizational barriers for implementing evaluation; list the top three in your (anonymous) organization; create summary of barriers for Research SIG

Handouts: Finding an Evaluator (Elizabeth Oyer), Working with Evaluators (Tom Clark)

11:40 am **Wrap-up**

EVALUATION ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE (Part I)				
Goal (based on vision)	Specific objectives (needs)	Questions to be addressed to decide if the program met the objective	Activities and services provided to meet objectives	Desired outcomes (changes in individuals or organizations)
<i>[local school example] Goal: To provide high quality learning experience for online credit recovery students.</i>	<i>To increase the course pass rates of local high school students enrolled in an online credit recovery program</i>	<i>Can Alpha High School improve the online course pass rates of credit recovery students by implementing new student support structures?</i>	<i>Develop an evidence- based student support model and provide training and ongoing support for school lab facilitators; provide netbooks, lab access, and ongoing</i>	<i>A higher percentage of students pass their courses across underserved subgroups. (The outcome reflects a change in individual student behavior)</i>
Goal:	Objective (need):	Questions to be addressed:	Activities and services provided to meet objectives:	Desired Outcome(s):
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EVALUATION ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE (Part II)

Measures & instruments	Data Sources	Outcome indicators (measures of outcome attainment)	Monitoring Cycle	Improvement Plan
<i>Qualitative: Lab facilitator interviews/student focus group protocols; observations; Extant: records of online course activity , scores, grades</i>	<i>Disaggregated student records; course and graduation records</i>	<i>Course pass rates of credit recovery students increase 10 percent compared to the prior year.</i>	<i>Asst. Principal gathers data monthly on student progress, monitors program fidelity</i>	<i>Quarterly progress meetings and annual revision of activities, goals, targets</i>
Measures:	Data Sources:	Outcome Indicators(s):	Monitoring Plan:	Improvement Cycle:
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Major Questions for Small Group Activities

Part 1a: What are your organization's mission and goals?

What is your organization's mission and what are three main goals?

What program activities do you carry out to meet each of these goals?

Part 1b: What are your evaluation needs and interests?

What are your evaluation needs and interests in relation to your program goals and activities?

What specific evaluation questions do you have about your organization's progress toward your goals?

Part 2a: What are your desired outcomes?

What program outcomes (changes in people's knowledge, skills, attitudes, behavior or status) are the focus of your organizational goals?

What data are needed to measure the progress toward achieving these outcomes?

Part 2b: What are your outcome indicators?

An *Outcome Indicator* states the specific benchmark for determining if an Outcome has been achieved. It tells us WHO achieves the Outcome; WHAT the outcome is, and the performance TARGET.

For Example: [who] Enrolled student; [what] pass rates will increase [target] 10% over prior year

How would you write one or more outcome indicators, to express desired program outcome(s) that are related to your evaluation question?

Who:

What:

Target:

Part 3: Unanswered questions; Barriers to Evaluation

Please discuss with a peer your major unanswered questions, and compile a list of these questions at your table. A Q & A on unanswered questions will follow.

Then discuss barriers for implementing evaluation in your organization, and make a list the top three barriers. A summary of barriers to evaluation will be presented at the iNACOL Research SIG meeting on Saturday.

Virtual High School Global Consortium Outcomes-Based Program Evaluation

The mission of Virtual High School is to develop and deliver standards-based, student-centered online courses to expand students' educational opportunities and 21st century skills and to offer professional development to teachers to expand the scope and depth of their instructional skills.

Background: Virtual High School (www.goVHS.org) started in 1996 with a Technology Innovation Challenge Grant from the US Department of Education. The purpose of the grant effort was to create a national collaborative of schools offering online courses. VHS is an educational non-profit that focuses on the development and delivery of advanced, elective, technical and interdisciplinary courses that complement a school's core offerings. Some of the courses VHS offers include Advanced Placement Statistics, Career Awareness for the New Millennium, Web Design: Artistry and Functionality, and Pre-AP-level English Language and Composition (<http://www.govhs.org/Pages/Academics-Catalog>). All VHS courses are taught by certified teachers from schools participating in the VHS collaborative. VHS courses and teachers meet iNACOL's design and delivery standards and are reviewed against those standards on a periodic basis.

VHS's Outcome-Based Program Evaluation

Program Evaluation: VHS annually evaluates its performance by measuring growth and quality, using both hard data and survey input from member school superintendents, principals, teachers, site coordinators and students. Results are published in the annual evaluation reports (<http://www.govhs.org/Pages/WhyVHS-Home> Results) which are conducted by an independent evaluation team. VHS has developed a set of outcomes-based Quality Indicators to measure the quality of its courses, professional development and program services. The data to determine the Quality Indicators is collected as part of the annual program evaluation. VHS staff uses growth and quality data to determine annual goals, as well as to develop and revise the VHS five-year strategic plan.

Growth Indicators: VHS annually sets and measures growth goals. Growth is measured by the number of schools, students and courses in VHS. For 2010/2011 the following were attained:

- Number of VHS schools: 770
- Number of VHS students: 15,237
- Number of VHS course sections: 412

Quality Indicators: The VHS mission statement, "to develop and deliver standards-based, student-centered online courses to expand students' educational opportunities and 21st century skills and to offer professional development to teachers to expand the scope and depth of their instructional skills" focuses VHS's efforts on two primary areas: development and delivery of online courses, and

preparation of classroom teachers to be effective online teachers. A third area of focus is to create a membership model of program services that enables VHS to be a self-sustaining non-profit organization.

VHS's Quality Indicators

Quality of Courses

Rigor and quality of VHS courses are measured by AP exam pass rates, percentage of AP students taking the AP exam, course completion rates, and percentage of students taking courses for credit recovery who recover credit. During 2010/2011

- o **66%** of the VHS AP students who took the **AP exam passed** with a score of 3 or higher. The national AP exam pass rate for all students was 58%;
- o **81%** of VHS **AP students took the AP exam**;
- o 81% of all VHS students **successfully completed their VHS course** with a grade of 60 or higher;
- o **73%** of students who took summer courses to **recover course credits** successfully completed their courses;
- o Survey data indicates high levels of satisfaction with development of 21st century skills, student collaboration and student engagement in VHS course content.

Quality of Professional Development

Indicators of the quality and rigor of VHS's teacher professional development program are the percentage of teachers who successfully complete the online professional development course as evidenced by demonstration of online teaching skills mastery, and the percentage of teachers able to successfully navigate their first semester of teaching online, meeting all VHS's standards for online course delivery. In 2010-2011:

- o **98%** of VHS teachers successfully **completed VHS training**; and
- o **93%** of VHS's first-year teachers demonstrated the successful habits of practice of **effective online teachers**.

Quality of Services and Program

Indicators of the quality of VHS services and program are membership retention rates, member school enrollment utilization rates and course seat utilization rates. The membership retention rate is defined as the percentage of schools which renew membership from one school year to another. Member school enrollment utilization rates are based upon the number of student seats a school uses as a percentage of the total number to which the school is entitled as part of its membership contract with VHS. Course seat utilization rates are based upon the percentage of students filling available seats in a course (usually 25 course seats are available in each course section). In 2010-2011:

- o **92%** of member schools **renewed their membership**;
- o member schools **utilized 72% of the student enrollment seats** they were entitled to, and,
- o **82%** of available VHS **student seats were utilized**.

Finding an Evaluator



"Let's hold off making a decision until we have even more information we don't really need."

Databases:

http://www.eval.org/find_an_evaluator/evaluator_search.asp

<http://ec.wmich.edu/evaldir/>

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/references/registries/EVLSearch.aspx>

Qualities:

Formal Education. Look for research methodology or formal evaluation training, not just a PhD.

Experience. Ideally with your organization type, within your field.

Evaluation Philosophy. Will they build your capacity as well as deliver results? Do they have experience in a wide range of methodologies that serve your needs?

Communication Skills. Listening to your needs, explaining your options, and disseminating your results requires a close partnership.

Resources. Internal versus external, your needs and resources will inform your decision.

References. Talk to clients (and peers) and see how satisfied they are with their evaluators.

Resources:

<http://www.jrsa.org/pubs/juv-justice/evaluator.pdf>

<http://www.jbassoc.com/reports/documents/locating%20and%20hiring%20an%20evaluator.pdf>

http://www.nigms.nih.gov/Research/Evaluation/hire_evaluator.htm

WORKING WITH EVALUATORS

Tom Clark, PhD, TA Consulting

Should I use an external or an internal evaluator?

External funders often require evaluation of a program by an outside party – an external evaluator -- to ensure its objectivity. However, many evaluations are elective in nature – an organization decides to carry out an evaluation for the purpose of maximizing program success or to be ready for accountability requirements down the road. The organization is free to determine what kind of evaluation assistance is needed – internal or external.

Internal and external evaluation activities are complementary in nature and together can provide a full range of information for program managers.

- Most organizations already carry out internal evaluation activities. Routine data gathering and analysis for performance reporting and data-driven decision making purposes are typically internal evaluation functions. For this kind of information need, it can pay dividends long-term to develop internal staff capacity.
- Organizations often call upon outside evaluation consultants in areas where they lack expertise, or to validate their own efforts. Studies of educational programs carried out on an occasional basis, are typically an external evaluation function.
- External evaluation can:
 - Validate performance data and refine performance indicators
 - Provide information beyond performance measures
 - Address strategic, not programmatic, goals
 - Provide third party validation of the program
 - Explore hypotheses and provide context beyond the individual program¹

How can we work best with internal or external evaluators?

Involve evaluators as early as possible. Consult external evaluators or internal evaluation staff role at the beginning of the project or program period you want evaluated, if at all possible. If you wait until later on, you may find that you haven't been gathering data needed to document your program's outcomes.

Think about what you want to know. Consider your mission, goals, and activities, and how well your activities are helping you accomplish your goals. Are there needs or interests related to achieving key goals? Questions that you would like to explore? Think about and discuss these issues beforehand.

Ask who will use the information, and how. Consider who are the key stakeholders and audiences with whom you will share results, and when information about your program is most valuable in your planning cycles. Seek to time reports for best use, and ask for evaluation reporting that is accessible and understandable for your stakeholders and key decision makers.

There are some valuable resources online for those considering when and how to use external evaluators, such as a summary brief by Rutnik and Campbell (2002)²

¹ U. S. Department of Education (1999). *Performance reporting and evaluation under GPRA*.

² www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/when%20and%20how%20external%20evaluators.pdf